

The Air-Sea Battle Concept: Implications for the National Defense Narrative

by

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Air-Sea Battle is an emerging operational concept borne of the growing complexity of Anti-Access and Area Denial challenges throughout the world, recognizing that denied access is not a new paradigm. Air-Sea Battle seeks to ensure strategic reach and cross-domain operational maneuverability for the joint force, in support of ends articulated by the National Command Authority. Air-Sea Battle's emergence coincides with the ostensible U.S. rebalancing to the Asia-Pacific region, potentially skewing the concept's relevance for employment in other regions of the world. While Air-Sea Battle represents one way to support national grand strategy, the effects of wedding this concept to strategic direction for our military are far-reaching, in terms of materiel and manpower, over the next two decades. This monograph explores Air-Sea Battle, focusing on its potential implications for the national grand strategy debate and the defense narrative, and recommends ways to inform and influence defense stakeholders and constituents. Air-Sea Battle's success or failure as an operational concept is tied to its feasibility, acceptability and suitability to ensure necessary access, for the advancement of U.S., allied and partner nation interests.

The Air-Sea Battle Concept: Implications for the National Defense Narrative

“Let us say at the outset what Air-Sea Battle is not. It is not a strategy... To the contrary, it is an operating concept that seeks to assure, in the face of rising technological challenges, that all components of U.S. and allied forces can be brought to bear as deemed necessary.”

–Air Sea Battle Office Co-Leads CAPT DuPree & Col Thomas¹

Introduction

Air-Sea Battle is an emerging operational concept borne of the growing complexities of anti-access and area denial (A2/AD) challenges throughout the world, seemingly with emphasis in the Asia-Pacific region.² The concept seeks to ensure strategic reach and cross-domain operational maneuverability and flexibility for the joint force, if called upon by the National Command Authority (NCA) to achieve objectives in support of national strategy. Air-Sea Battle is receiving increasing scrutiny in defense and policy circles due to the ostensible American rebalance to the Asia-Pacific region, as a nested component of the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff new Joint Operational Access Concept.³ After a decade-plus of United States (U.S.) involvement in protracted, low-intensity conflicts in Afghanistan and Iraq, Air-Sea Battle is emerging as a potential operational concept to gain and maintain access for the joint force.

Compared to recent U.S. military operations over the last decade, Air-Sea Battle represents a more conventional force posture and way of employment, presupposing high intensity nation-state versus nation-state conflict in a contested environment. Somewhat analogous to Air-Sea Battle is the Air-Land Battle doctrine, which ultimately yielded the outstanding synergy and lethality of the joint combined arms maneuver force, tested and proven in the 1991 Persian Gulf War, and the subsequent invasion of

Iraq in 2003.⁴ However, the Air-Land Battle doctrine emerged in the specter of an overwhelming and defined Soviet conventional arms threat to Western Europe.

Air-Sea Battle in its current conceptual state may assist in informing national strategy, yet it does not represent a strategy or doctrine by itself.⁵ An examination of ends, ways and means, balanced by risk, domestic political considerations and feasibility, acceptability and suitability, may or may not embrace Air-Sea Battle as a way to assist in achieving American national grand strategy. Quite simply, materiel components of the concept may be prohibitively expensive given the U.S.'s current fiscal crisis. Any military concept or strategy must be affordable to the nation, lest the nation risk spending considerable treasure on force structure, which may be economically detrimental to the nation.⁶ The tension between military strategy and means that are "good enough," must be balanced with the current American desire to spend lesser amounts on defense. Keep in mind that effective, enduring strategies must address uncertainty, especially in the military realm.⁷

Given current and longer-term fiscal uncertainties facing the U.S., the Air-Sea Battle concept contributes to the defense debate and narrative in an evocative manner. However, its narrative resonates differently to various constituencies and stakeholders, including the American people, Congress, foreign governments, the defense industry, the military branches, and many other interested parties. This monograph will consider the merits of Air-Sea Battle through the lens of national grand strategy, and the concept's implications for the defense narrative. Included is an examination of background, assumptions, current national guidance, where the narrative resides by service, and recommendations for the future Air-Sea Battle narrative, to include how it

can best inform the U.S. national debate and defense expenditures.

Background and Assumptions

At its core, Air-Sea Battle is about preserving and maintaining access across the domains of warfare. Although A2/AD is the current terminology, denial of adversary strategic reach, access and the ability to maneuver is ageless; examples of A2/AD appear throughout history. During World War II, German Kriegsmarine submarine “Wolfpacks” wreaked havoc on Allied shipping in the North Atlantic, severely curtailing oceanic, bulk resupply of the Allied powers.⁸ Similarly, the A2/AD threat posed by North Vietnamese anti-aircraft artillery and surface-to-air missiles made North Vietnam the most heavily defended piece of territory in the world during the 1960s and early 1970s. American airpower losses due to these North Vietnamese air defenses were sobering, as were Israeli Air Force losses early in the Yom Kippur War for similar reasons.⁹

Prior to the end of World War II and the dawn of the nuclear age, American defense strategy did not require a large, standing military force. However, with America’s ascension onto the world stage as a superpower, a large standing military force became a norm in the last half of the 20th century, throughout the course of the Cold War. The collapse of Communism resulted in substantial defense cuts in the 1990s, with the elimination of extensive manpower, materiel and bases. Thus began an extended “procurement holiday,” which sought to capitalize on the post-Cold War peace dividend. Simultaneously, the Former Soviet Union (FSU), client states, and the People’s Republic of China (China) began fielding sophisticated A2/AD weapons such as advanced surface-to-air and surface-to-surface missile systems, subtly amplifying the threat level in various parts of the world.

The character of the Iraq and Afghanistan wars has not highlighted these operational level A2/AD threats, with permissive battlespace in every domain except in and among the people of those nations.¹⁰ Expectations of air, sea, land, space, and cyber superiority are not unreasonable, if the conflicts of the last two decades are the units of measure.¹¹ The American government and her people should not assume continuing U.S. superiority in all domains, since superiority is relative in time and space, and perishable as adversaries seek asymmetric advantage against U.S. strengths.

With a decade-plus of protracted wars in Iraq and Afghanistan presumably ending in the near-term, the American people appear to be loath to maintain an expensive, standing military force, unless they perceive a risk and corresponding threat to the U.S. While the risk of violent extremism remains a worldwide threat, threats from other nation-states are not necessarily clear. Senior military leaders are obligated to articulate threats and risk mitigation strategies to the civilian leadership in order to enable U.S. national security policy.¹² The risk calculus must include an examination of threats, which encompass the most likely to the most dangerous adversary courses of action, and include ways to reduce and mitigate these threats in support of overarching strategy. A reasonable question to ask is whether Air-Sea Battle is worthy of consideration at the national level without a defined enemy, a so-called “boogey man?”

Officially, Air-Sea Battle is not oriented on an absolute region or foe, since the intentions of China, the Islamic Republic of Iran, North Korea and other nation-state actors are poorly defined at best. To maximize its strategic value, Air-Sea Battle should retain a global versus narrow, regional focus. Unfortunately, assumptions about China’s long-term intentions are intertwined with Air-Sea Battle, which is not necessarily

desired.¹³ This fact, coupled with the recent rebalancing of U.S. priorities to the Asia-Pacific region inadvertently creates a synergy of U.S. policy and potential military strategy. The U.S. is China's largest trading partner in this 21st century era of globalization. China also holds a staggering \$1.14 trillion in American debt, the greatest amount held by any foreign partner.¹⁴ American default on or Chinese calling of this debt defies logic.¹⁵ American and Chinese economic symbiosis or interdependence makes a conflict between the two partners unrealistic, though not completely improbable; great power politics often defy logic. Ultimately, rational nations act in a manner "deemed" in their best interests, in a realistic manner.¹⁶ Although these representative countries may present an A2/AD challenge in the event of military conflict, they should not represent an inevitable, self-fulfilling threat to the U.S.¹⁷ It is imperative U.S. decision makers do not become myopic about Air-Sea Battle or access challenges, because access challenges could come from any region of the world, or manifest themselves in any domain.

In the current environment, the U.S. national leaders have articulated various policy statements on her enduring interests without articulating a specific national grand strategy.¹⁸ The most authoritative guidance on strategy is embodied in the January 2012 Defense Strategic Guidance. While not at the national grand strategy level, it is adequate for military leaders to plan for emerging threats and ensure necessary capabilities are resident in the joint force. Not having a national grand strategy ensures U.S. response options remain open in the event of crisis, but an inherent risk of this absence could be strategic paralysis at the onset of crisis, or worse, an ill-advised, erratic reaction to potential threats. A somewhat predictable U.S. strategy may provide

“off-ramp” opportunities for adversary nations or actors in the event of a crisis.

Conversely, a less-defined strategy may cause overreaction or strategic miscue to adversaries. Air-Sea Battle can inform national grand strategy, provide options to the NCA, and assist in maintaining vital access to U.S. national interests.

Since Air-Sea Battle is about preserving U.S. strategic options, access and freedom of maneuver for the joint force, the concept must orient toward protecting and ensuring access to the global commons, whether air, sea, cyber or space. For example, 50% of the world’s seaborne tonnage passes through the South China Sea.¹⁹ The global sea lines of communication interleaving the region are vital to the global economy and U.S. interests.²⁰ Correspondingly, 40% of the world’s “traded crude oil” passes through the Persian Gulf and its critical chokepoint, the Strait of Hormuz.²¹ The inability to ensure access in either of these regions could cause ruinous economic effects.

Of perhaps even more immediate concern is safe, reliable, secure access to the cyber domain, along with associated communications access provided through the space domain, via 1,100 satellites and an estimated 9,000 on-orbit transponders by 2015.²² Although somewhat difficult to envisage, the cyber domain carries an extraordinary amount of data daily which feeds the world economy, ensures worldwide connectivity between people (thereby lessening the importance of borders and nationalities), ensures the operation of banking, transportation, and utility systems, and provides a means of command and control for U.S. military forces. As a measure of the cyber domain’s importance, the U.S. Department of Commerce estimates annual global on-line transactions of approximately \$10 trillion.²³ While denying access to the air, sea, and space domains requires a certain materiel capability, training and intent, denying

access to the cyber domain can be done cheaply with little materiel capability, producing effects as devastating to the U.S. economy as physical destruction. Clearly, access to the global commons provides a compelling reason to consider Air-Sea Battle as a possible contribution to U.S. strategy, lest a country inhibit or deny air, maritime, cyber or space traffic essential to the health of the global economy.

National Guidance and the Air-Sea Battle Narrative

In 2008, then-Secretary of Defense Robert Gates published the *National Defense Strategy*. This strategy mentioned A2/AD for the first time in a governmental strategy document. However, with ongoing operations in Iraq and Afghanistan, A2/AD received scant media coverage. Early in 2010, Secretary Gates published the *Quadrennial Defense Review Report* (QDR). This document is replete with references to A2/AD challenges. In fact, defeating and deterring aggression in A2/AD scenarios is listed as one of six key mission areas for the Department of Defense to pursue.²⁴ Also, the QDR offered the Air-Sea Battle concept for the first time in an official Department of Defense publication, as a possible way to provide solutions for A2/AD challenges.²⁵

Several months after the 2010 publication of the QDR, President Barack Obama published his *National Security Strategy* (NSS), highlighting the need for the American military to be prepared to fight along the spectrum of conflict, including the ability to operate and prevail in anti-access situations.²⁶ Concerning the use of force, President Obama stated “this means credibly underwriting U.S. defense commitments with tailored approaches to deterrence and ensuring the U.S. military continues to have the necessary capabilities across all domains-land, air, sea, space, and cyber.”²⁷ Deterrence is the key principle, which permits regional stability and allows America’s

elements of power to preserve national and international interests.

In 2011, then-Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, Admiral Michael Mullen, published the *National Military Strategy (NMS)*. Admiral Mullen discussed the need to defeat aggression and in-turn, “counter anti-access and area-denial strategies.”²⁸ In January 2012, Secretary of Defense Leon Panetta released the *Defense Strategic Guidance (DSG)*, which highlighted the rebalance to the Asia-Pacific region for the first time in a strategy document.²⁹ Of the ten “primary” yet non-prioritized armed forces missions discussed in the guidance, the third mission directly addresses uncertain future threats and challenges: “project power despite A2/AD challenges.”^{30/31} Of interest, neither the NMS nor the DSG directly mentioned Air-Sea Battle.

Perhaps due to the fact that access for U.S. operations in the recent past has been uncontested, Air-Sea Battle’s treatment by the private sector has been limited and primarily focused on the Asia-Pacific region. The most scholarly and comprehensive study of Air-Sea Battle to date occurred in 2010, when the Center for Strategic and Budgetary Assessments (CSBA) released two studies, the second entitled *AirSea Battle: A Point-of-Departure Operational Concept*.³² Authored by four CSBA fellows, all of whom are former military officers, the study postulated Air-Sea Battle as a means to help “set the conditions at the operational level to sustain a stable, favorable conventional military balance,” with recommended emphasis on deterrence in the Asia-Pacific region.³³ These conditions allow for strategic reach and enable access for the joint force in a contested environment. The study provided meaningful insight into what Air-Sea Battle is and what it is not. Most importantly, the study helped to energize the Air-Sea Battle debate and narrative at the national level.

The Current Service Narratives

Air-Sea Battle elicits emotion in the U.S. defense establishment, especially in the politically charged world of Washington, DC. Despite professed jointness, individual service parochialisms, in concert with declining defense budgets and national fiscal woes, add fuel to the discussion on the concept's necessity or validity. The individual service branches began exploring the concept prior to the embrace of the greater Department of Defense establishment, fueling the assertion that the Air Force and the Navy are using Air-Sea Battle to justify modernization and additional force structure after more than a decade of acting in mainly supporting roles in Iraq and Afghanistan. Part of the emotion stems from the misunderstanding that Air Force and Navy primacy occurs at the expense of the land service components.³⁴ Since Air-Sea Battle is largely sea domain-focused, many military leaders, especially Army, find themselves justifying the importance, relevance and size of the land components, with the coming drawdown of forces deployed to Afghanistan, and on the bow wave of significant defense cuts.

The American Heritage Dictionary defines narrative as “consisting of or characterized by the telling of a story.”³⁵ Each service, each stakeholder and constituency possesses its own narrative, about Air-Sea Battle or otherwise. The essence of a narrative is about desired messaging as shaped by the disseminator, the message received by the intended audience, the effect(s) as determined by the actions of the targeted audience, as well as the actions of actors on the periphery of the narrative. The narratives for each of the services recognize the necessity to cut personnel and weapon systems as the U.S. military reorients after Afghanistan and Iraq. The Army and the Marine Corps will lose substantial personnel numbers, with the Navy

and the Air Force losing more materiel than personnel. These narratives are complicated by the uncertainty propagated by operating on a Continuing Resolution, at fiscal year 2012 funding levels, as well as implications of sequestration.³⁶ These funding challenges further highlight the necessary connection between strategy and resources.

The current Air Force narrative is principally centered on the need to recapitalize an aging fleet of warplanes.³⁷ As a service organized around technology, the Air Force views its role as providing decisive effects across the spectrum of operations, exploiting the speed, range and flexibility of the air, space and cyber domains. After the 1991 Persian Gulf War, the service made a conscious investment decision to pursue transformative yet expensive fifth generation stealth technology for subsequent purchases. The F-22A Raptor is the first product of that decision. However, due to an extended procurement process which drove substantial program cost overruns, Secretary of Defense Robert Gates terminated the F-22 acquisition program at 187 aircraft, a mere 25% of the originally desired purchase total.³⁸ With the reduced F-22 buy, and fielding delays for the F-35 Lightning II Joint Strike Fighter (JSF), legacy 4th generation Air Force fighter aircraft must remain in service longer than desired, even as they become less relevant in the contested A2/AD environment.³⁹ Of note, the acquisition challenges of the F-35 program must be carefully controlled and mitigated, because failure to produce a suitable aircraft in sufficient quantities to replace legacy aircraft could have devastating impacts on the aviation force structures of the Air Force, Navy, Marine Corps, allied and partner nations, while denying operational commanders a significant capability in their arsenals for A2/AD scenarios.

Under the leadership of former Secretary of the Air Force, Michael Wynne, and

former Chief of Staff, General T. Michael Moseley, the service trimmed personnel in order to preserve money for weapon system acquisition. Hence, for several years, the Air Force strategy has revolved around "trading size to maintain a quality force, and staying focused on readiness and modernization," in an endeavor to avoid a hollow force.⁴⁰ With the Asia-Pacific rebalance and the advent of Air-Sea Battle, the service force structure and acquisition desires will be favorably impacted. At present, some 60% of Air Force units based outside the continental U.S. reside in the Asia-Pacific region.⁴¹ Beyond basing, Air-Sea Battle provides an impetus to upgrade an aging fleet in order to be equipped and relevant when America calls on the service to defend her interests.⁴²

The current Navy narrative is best summarized by Chief of Naval Operations Admiral Jonathan Greenert's three tenets: "Warfighting First, Operate Forward, and Be Ready."⁴³ Much like the Air Force, the Navy has been substantially engaged in Iraq and Afghanistan, though primarily in a supporting role. Also, the Navy continues to maintain worldwide commitments to engage allies and friends, while projecting power with her highly capable, yet aging surface and subsurface fleets. A primary focus of this power projection has been the Persian Gulf, in an effort to ensure access to oil supplies in the region, while Iran continues to telegraph bellicose signals. Based on budget pressure, the service continues to selectively divest itself of aging ships, including eleven in fiscal year 2013.⁴⁴ With the aim of recapitalizing aging equipment and meeting emerging threats, the Navy is procuring ships and submarines in limited numbers, such as the Littoral Combat Ship and Virginia class submarines.⁴⁵ Additionally, the Navy is continuing to procure various tactical aircraft such as F/A-18E/F models, and the F-35.

In order to meet the demands of Asia-Pacific rebalancing, the Navy is changing

the balance of ships with homeports in the Pacific to 60% of the fleet by 2020.⁴⁶

Furthermore, the Navy/Marine Corps team continues to further refine amphibious warfare concepts, as evident by the "Single Naval Battle" concept.⁴⁷ The rebalancing coupled with existing acquisition projects will make the Navy eminently more capable worldwide and more able to effectively develop then employ Air-Sea Battle.

The current Marine Corps narrative is relatively static and enduring: the story of a proud fighting force, amphibious in character, maintaining the highest readiness to deploy and employ on short notice in support of national objectives. The Marines occupy a relatively small piece of the DOD budget, at approximately 8%, while occupying the niche as America's "crisis response force."⁴⁸ This does not infer the Marines are a second land army, nor can it be with its relatively small size and limited staying power in terms of logistics.⁴⁹ With a constant afloat presence of three Amphibious Ready Groups and the corresponding embarked Marine Expeditionary Units/Marine Air-Ground Task Forces, these provide America a continuous forward-deployed *force in being*, ensuring strategic reach and mobility for decisive operations.

The Marine Corps has been heavily tasked in Iraq and Afghanistan. Unlike the Army, the looming Marine force structure cuts will be less dramatic, and require fewer hard choices about capabilities that may be cut. The service will decrease its numbers from 202,000 to 182,100, returning to approximate pre-9/11 force levels.⁵⁰ However, its forces will retain their amphibious specialty and unique partnership with the Navy. The Asia-Pacific rebalancing is favorable for the Marines and their traditional focus on Asia. Additionally, refinement of concepts like Operational Maneuver From the Sea and Ship-to-Objective-Maneuver position the service well for contribution to Air-Sea Battle,

focusing on two unique Marine contributions: "distributed ground maneuver, and dispersed aviation basing and employment."⁵¹ Continued purchases of CV-22 and F-35 aircraft are providing necessary, timely upgrades to Marine Corps capabilities.

The present Army narrative is perhaps the most complicated of the service narratives to dissect and disseminate. In the wake of disengagement from Iraq and Afghanistan, the Army stands to reduce its active-duty personnel numbers from 562,000 to 490,000, and perhaps further.⁵² Based on the pending drawdown, the service seeks to maintain tailorable, scalable (and reversible) landpower forces capable across a wide-range of competencies in order to be able to "prevent, shape and win" in an uncertain future.⁵³ Underpinning the overall narrative is the Army (and joint-service) concern that force structure cuts do not ever result in another Task Force SMITH.⁵⁴

Unfortunately, the stated rebalancing to the Asia-Pacific region is potentially skewing the debate on what the proper size of the Army should be, based on the assumption that large-scale landpower formations will not be necessary to maintain American security and interests in the future. As Army Chief of Staff General Raymond Odierno points out, while the character of conflict is changing, "the fundamental nature of war remains the same...a struggle to influence key terrain, populations, and governance."⁵⁵ Land forces have a staying power that air and naval forces do not possess, as they operate in and among the human terrain.

The Army offers much to the Asia-Pacific rebalance and Air-Sea Battle, although many of those capabilities may not be represented by large-scale combat arms maneuver forces. General Odierno poignantly asserts the support the Army provides to sister services and the whole of government "is often overlooked."⁵⁶ Specifically, the

Army possesses a myriad of capabilities, which contribute substantially to the six joint functions, and subordinate tasks and missions: “command and control, intelligence, fires, movement and maneuver, protection and sustainment.”⁵⁷ While each service contributes to these joint functions, the Army provides unique expertise in Theater Missile Defense/Ballistic Missile Defense (joint fires and protection) and sustainment. Additional contributions to the joint force include (but are not limited to) cyber defense and offense, Special Operations Forces, Space Operations, Signals, Logistics, and an important emerging capability, regionally aligned ground combat and maneuver forces, building concrete relationships with theater partners.⁵⁸

Whither Air-Sea Battle?

Military strategy must be nested in national grand strategy. In the globalized world of the 21st century, the economic element of power (way) arguably offers more impact on nation-state actors, than raw military power.⁵⁹ But, the economic element may not provide the same level of inducement or coercion to non-state actors. Whether U.S. foreign policy is activist or more cautious in the future, the military element of power will remain integral to maintaining U.S. domestic and international interests. However, maintaining and reinforcing these interests comes at a cost, monetarily and in terms of risk. The American government and her people need to articulate what capabilities they want and can afford from her military; for example, overwhelming majority, parity, risk of inferiority, or equilibrium. The Air-Sea Battle concept and capabilities “deemed necessary” must be refined by the NCA. In turn, the service or government agency that can best articulate “as deemed necessary” will be favorably postured for employment and the future budget battles concerning the concept. Air-Sea Battle should inform U.S.

strategy, but the A2/AD threat it proposes to mitigate is not the sole threat the U.S. will face. Hence, Air-Sea Battle is but one employment option or imperative for the NCA.

The Air-Sea Battle narrative controlled by the Department of Defense includes many more facets beyond materiel, and most are substantially cheaper and timely to implement. Per the U.S. military's own definition, a joint concept "links strategic guidance to the development and employment of future joint force capabilities and serves as 'engines for transformation' that may ultimately lead to doctrine, organization, training, materiel, leadership and education, personnel and facilities (DOTMLPF) and policy changes."⁶⁰ Beyond costly materiel or facilities solutions, doctrine, organization, training, leadership and education, and personnel represent lower relative cost and higher payoff contributions to the Air-Sea Battle concept. Innovative cross-domain solutions across DOTMLPF are within the grasp of the U.S. military, even in the current fiscally austere environment.⁶¹ The power inherent to each of the domains must be realized to its fullest, and synergized with the other domains.

The Department of Defense established a multi-service Air-Sea Battle Office in 2011, in order to leverage joint synergies in pursuit of operationalizing the Air-Sea Battle concept. The Air Force and Navy provide full-time representatives for the office, with Army and Marine Corps representatives working part-time.⁶² The personnel who comprise the office are taken from service staff manning, meaning they are not a joint organization resourced via eJMAPS.⁶³ Because of this, the office works under the principle of "consensus," without benefit of one joint boss.⁶⁴ Of significance, the Air-Sea Battle narrative is owned not by the Air-Sea Battle Office, but by each service and the parent Office of the Secretary of Defense Public Affairs apparatus. Hence, a significant

challenge to synchronizing the narrative is ensuring Congress is educated and informed in a uniform, consistent manner by each service's Legislative Liaison office.

By its very name, Air-Sea Battle superficially excludes the land components, an important consideration for the Air-Sea Battle narrative's effectiveness. A broader way to refer to Air-Sea Battle would be to refer to the parent Joint Operational Access Concept. Air-Sea Battle is not a feasible, acceptable or suitable operational concept if land force contributions are not included and leveraged. Land force formations provide enduring presence (if desired) in the land domain, whether for combat or post-combat stability operations. Rhetorically, a series of questions must be considered by strategists and planners to prepare for post-Phase III operations (post-hostilities), when air and naval kinetic capabilities are less effective, resulting in less demand for these forces and greater demand for land forces. Does the situation necessitate U.S. participation in Phase IV and V operations, stabilizing and enabling civil authority, such as the potential for Phase IV and V operations in Syria and Mali, among other failed states? Do competing powers peacefully return to garrison after hostilities? Is a settlement requiring no "U.S. boots on the ground" acceptable to all parties? The answers to these questions are relevant to the Air-Sea Battle narrative nested in the overall military strategy. Similarly, an earnest debate on the future structure of Army maneuver forces is necessary given that A2/AD is but one challenge in an uncertain world.⁶⁵

President Ronald Reagan's Star Wars Program pushed the Soviet Union to spend enormous capital on countering the Program, contributing to the eventual breakdown and splinter of the Soviet Union. Heeding the echoes of history, the U.S. cannot afford to engage in an expensive arms race ultimately detrimental to the national

economy. The Air-Sea Battle narrative certainly affects each service's force structure and acquisition strategies, which resonate to the various stakeholders who have an interest in force structure. Foremost among these stakeholders is the U.S. Congress.

While the U.S. Congress will not solely determine the contribution of Air-Sea Battle to U.S. military strategy, its control of funding for weapons systems and force structure (manpower) is critical to the potential viability of the concept.⁶⁶ Funding is the most enduring challenge due to the U.S. economic constraints, such as manpower costs and other burgeoning "must-pay" social programs for the American people. The joint service community and individual services must reach out aggressively to individual Congressmen, via Legislative Liaison offices and senior leader engagement, to make the case for why Air-Sea Battle should be pursued. If Congress does not embrace Air-Sea Battle, its materiel aspect likely will not be realized and access may not be assured across the domains.

Furthermore, the Air-Sea Battle narrative must include the perspective of the American defense industry, since "industrial war" requires industry to be possible.⁶⁷ Industry must be prepared for the inevitable give and take of defense acquisition, while the U.S. government must commit to retaining the viability and relevance of the U.S. defense industry. Only some of Air-Sea Battle's solutions are materiel, but materiel needs are not resourced quickly. The Defense Acquisition System in partnership with industry requires long-lead times to produce and field high-end items such as ships and aircraft: time and money are industry's most important variables to consider. An important benefit of further embracing the Air-Sea Battle concept is high-technology manufacturing and engineering demands will ensure the U.S. defense industrial base

remains vibrant, relevant and responsive.

Desired effects of messaging are important considerations for any narrative. The Department of Defense can advance the Air-Sea Battle concept's contribution to national strategy through timely, thoughtful communications synchronization of Public Affairs and Defense Support to Public Diplomacy, via the Department of State.⁶⁸ Effective communications synchronization can also help expand Air-Sea Battle's constituency to partner nations by articulating commonality in strategic aims and ways, demonstrating opportunities to leverage access capabilities. Assuming a smaller U.S. military with less than adequate American military power to service all U.S. interests simultaneously, partnering with allies, partners and friendly nations is imperative for the preservation of American and common international interests. Air-Sea Battle offers a way for U.S. allies, partners and friends to contribute to regional stability without shouldering the defense burden exclusively: stability and security by, with and through U.S. allies and partners. The use of alliances and partnerships also helps to diffuse American unilateralism, whether perceived or real, leaving less opportunity for a vacuum of power or influence, which potential adversaries may exploit. Finally, the behavior of allies, friends and partners will be influenced by perceived American support for their countries and interests.

Air-Sea Battle telegraphs America's intentions and capabilities, perhaps in an intended manner, but also in unintended manners. In addition to the stated U.S. national security policies, academia, public and private think tanks perform the necessary role of advancing differing views in the American democracy. The government cannot restrain these organizations, meaning they may telegraph widely varying messages to various

constituencies, internal and external to the U.S, making the “say-do” gap between words and actions challenging to harmonize. But, this lack of restraint serves a useful purpose, allowing informed, reasoned debate without excessive governmental dissonance. The Air-Sea Battle narrative is not unified and somewhat incoherent because it is a relatively new concept, and since the A2/AD threats the concept seeks to overcome are not universally held as threats by the U.S. national leadership.

In the short-to-medium-term, the state of relative equilibrium may be the U.S.’s desired worldwide status quo. Equilibrium is defined “as a condition in which all acting influences are canceled by others, resulting in a stable, balanced or unchanging system.”⁶⁹ Maintaining or restoring order in a dynamic world that does not have consistent order, opens the possibilities of increased interdependence on U.S. regional allies, partners and friends. Quite simply, equilibrium may be favorable to U.S. interests, allowing her to maintain influence, and at least military parity, without suffering from national overreach of her interests or military forces. Equilibrium may induce increased U.S. risk in certain areas of the world, which must be actively managed. Air-Sea Battle represents a possible contribution to equilibrium and must be only part of the overall discussion on desired joint force structure and capabilities, realistically matching ends, ways and means.

Perhaps the greatest contribution of the Air-Sea Battle concept can be to serve as a forcing function for the American public and national leadership to engage in a reasoned, unemotional debate on the future of military force structure. This intellectual capital expended in peacetime should assist in enabling success in the event of war. Furthermore, Air-Sea Battle enhances joint-service cooperation, enhancing existing

synergies and relationships, without a panoply of exquisite new weapon systems.⁷⁰ The military element of power has been the stalwart of American power in the post-Cold War world. To assume the U.S. military will be the most effective and dominant element of power in the future is naïve and dangerous. Air-Sea Battle will be part of the U.S. defense narrative, but only as a larger part of the discussion on strategy.

Conclusion

Even with the swirling uncertainty of future defense budgets, the Air-Sea Battle concept is worthy of consideration as a contributing way for U.S. strategy. This author's assertion is Air-Sea Battle is a timely, necessary component of the overall U.S. strategic and defense narratives. At its core, Air-Sea Battle is about cross-domain access to the battlespace, ensuring U.S. freedom of maneuver, decision space and possibly deterring adversary actions. The concept will enable strategic reach, operational flexibility and maneuver space for the joint force, if called upon by the NCA to achieve objectives in support of national grand strategy. Nonetheless, fundamental questions about the concept's utility have yet to be answered. Air-Sea Battle assists in hedging against future threats presented by nation-state and non-state actors. But, it remains to be seen whether Air-Sea Battle is transitory or a lasting part of U.S. defense strategy.

Ultimately, Air-Sea Battle is a joint-service solution, which excludes individual service capability and force structure at the risk of failure to achieve and maintain required access, and hence the ability to secure U.S. national interests throughout the spectrum of conflict. Incurring risk entails making calculated trade-offs, allowing for more capabilities in some areas and less in others. Risks must be captured and communicated to U.S. national leaders so that they may make informed, reasoned

decisions on U.S. force structure. Part of the Air-Sea Battle portfolio includes materiel solutions, which may be necessary and cost prohibitive at the same time. Any military concept or strategy must be affordable to the nation. Fortunately, many of Air-Sea Battle's solutions are beyond the materiel realm, utilizing all aspects of the DOTMLPF.

The Air-Sea Battle concept is an important contribution to the defense debate and narrative. But, its narrative resonates in different sectors, to a wide variety of constituents and stakeholders. The U.S. Congress will play a critical role in funding necessary elements of Air-Sea Battle. Yet, with an incomplete narrative, which lacks unity among the services, securing the purchasing power of the Congress may be challenging. The services must present a unified perspective on the merits of Air-Sea Battle if the concept is to inform national strategy (ends), and impact potential ways and means. The U.S. defense industrial base also has an important role to play in the feasibility and affordability of the concept. Finally, the U.S. must continue to reassure allies and partners, while shaping and deterring the behavior of potential adversaries.

This monograph examined the Air-Sea Battle concept through the lens of national strategy, focusing on the concept's implications for the defense narrative to include strategy, force structure, the defense industrial base and corresponding budget impacts for the future. This study scoped background, assumptions, current national guidance, where the narrative resides by service, and recommendations for the future Air-Sea Battle narrative, to include how it should inform U.S. national grand strategy, future force structure, defense expenditures, and engagement with allies and partners. Air-Sea Battle is an important concept, worthy of examination and more importantly, worthy of debate, as the U.S. seeks to chart its future after more than a decade of war.

Endnotes

¹ Philip DuPree and Jordan Thomas, "Air-Sea Battle: Clearing the Fog," *Armed Forces Journal* (June 2012), <http://www.armedforcesjournal.com/2012/06/9955296> (accessed January 13, 2013).

² Anti-Access (A2) refers to an adversary's ability to prevent friendly forces from gaining access to an operating region or theater. Area Denial (AD) refers to an adversary inhibiting friendly maneuver in a particular area. A2/AD is about gaining friendly access to a theater, and operating in the theater once there.

³ DuPree and Thomas, "Air-Sea Battle."

⁴ Air-Land Battle began in the 1970s as a concept, much like Air-Sea Battle, then evolved into doctrine in the 1980s.

⁵ Nathan K. Finney, "Air-Sea Battle as a Military Contribution to Strategy Development," *Infinity Journal* 2, no. 4 (Fall 2012): 8, https://www.infinityjournal.com/article/79/AirSea_Battle_as_a_Military_Contribution_to_Strategy_Development/ (accessed January 15, 2013).

⁶ Rupert Smith, *The Utility of Force: The Art of War in the Modern World* (New York: Vintage Books, 2005), 22.

⁷ Jan van Tol et al., *AirSea Battle: A Point-of-Departure Operational Concept* (Washington, DC: Center for Strategic and Budgetary Assessments, 2010), x, <http://www.csbaonline.org/publications/2010/05/airsea-battle-concept/> (accessed January 23, 2012).

⁸ Smith, *The Utility of Force*, 138.

⁹ John T. Correll, "Take It Down! The Wild Weasels in Vietnam," *Air Force Magazine* 93, no. 7 (July 2010): 67, <http://www.airforcemagazine.com/MagazineArchive/Pages/2010/July%202010/0710weasels.aspx> (accessed February 26, 2013); John T. Correll, "Air Defense From the Ground Up," *Air Force Magazine* 66, no. 7 (July 1983): 39, <http://www.airforce-magazine.com/MagazineArchive/Pages/1983/July%201983/0783air.aspx> (accessed February 26, 2013).

¹⁰ At the strategic level, insurgents in Afghanistan and Iraq continually seek to deny popular access to legitimate governance.

¹¹ Domains are physical (Air, Land, Sea, Space), as well as the somewhat abstract (Cyber). The "human" sphere of influence is not universally regarded as a domain; it is referred to in this monograph as "terrain" vs. domain.

¹² The Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff's (CJCS) annual "Chairman's Risk Assessment" is the primary vehicle used to quantify risk to the NCA. The annual "Chairman's Program Assessment" and the "Chairman's Program Recommendation" are further used to provide CJCS advice on the link of defense programming to strategy.

¹³ T. X. Hammes, "Air-Sea Battle Isn't About China," *The National Interest*, October 19, 2012, <http://nationalinterest.org/commentary/airsea-battle-isnt-about-china-7627> (accessed January 28, 2013).

¹⁴ "Major Foreign Holders of Treasury Securities," June 2012, <http://www.treasury.gov/resource-center/data-chart-center/tic/Documents/mfh.txt> (accessed January 26, 2013).

¹⁵ It is important for American leaders to be aware the Chinese strategic outlook differs substantially from the Western tradition, practically and temporally, as illustrated by the type of games preferred by each culture. See David Lai, *Learning From the Stones: A GO Approach to Mastering China's Strategic Concept*, SHI (Carlisle, PA: Strategic Studies Institute, 2004), vi-29.

¹⁶ The elements of power presently leading U.S.-Sino engagement include the economic and diplomatic elements, assuming the U.S. manages the rise of China properly. The economic element represents the most powerful U.S.-Sino engagement tool for the foreseeable future. Diplomatically, the U.S. continues to seek China's assistance and regional leadership on the prickly problem of North Korea's nuclear program. Additionally, the U.S. seeks to cement relationships with China in various forums such as the United Nations Security Council, U.S.-China Strategic and Economic Dialogue, G-20, etc. Pragmatically, the continuation of close nation-to-nation ties between the U.S. and Taiwan is a persistent source of consternation to China and her national honor. Chinese national honor was further damaged by the 1995-96 standoff with Taiwan, in which two U.S. aircraft carriers sailed through the Taiwan Strait, providing a significant impetus for the subsequent Chinese military modernization/rearmament.

¹⁷ Greek philosopher Thucydides' "Fear, Honor and Interest" and Professor Samuel Huntington's "fault-lines of civilizations" are two examples (among many) of why nations go to war with each other. Transparency between nations and the corresponding nation-to-nation discourse is vital to ensure intentions are known and great power politics do not become an all or nothing, win-lose proposition or zero-sum game.

¹⁸ Anne Marie Slaughter, "Does Obama have a grand strategy for his second term? If not, he could try one of these," *The Washington Post*, January 18, 2013, http://articles.washingtonpost.com/2013-01-18/opinions/36474186_1_grand-strategy-national-security-strategy-foreign-policy (accessed March 2, 2013).

¹⁹ Assistant Secretary of State Kurt M. Campbell, *Maritime Territorial Disputes and Sovereignty Issues in Asia before the Senate Foreign Relations Committee Subcommittee on East Asian and Pacific Affairs*, 112th Cong., September 20, 2012, 1, <http://www.state.gov/p/eap/rls/rm/2012/09/197982.htm> (accessed November 29, 2012).

²⁰ Of note, the U.S. shares bilateral defense treaties with Japan, South Korea, the Philippines, Australia, Thailand, and a de facto treaty with Taiwan, littoral nations all. Among these nations, Japan, the Philippines (and Taiwan) exert overlapping claims with China over disputed islands in the East and South China Seas. Additionally, other countries such as Malaysia, Brunei and Vietnam exert claims to portions of the South China Sea.

²¹ Robert D. Kaplan, "Power Plays in the Indian Ocean: The Maritime Commons in the 21st Century," in *Contested Commons: The Future of American Power in a Multipolar World*, ed. Abraham M. Denmark and James Mulvenon (Washington, DC: Center for a New American Security, January 2010), 182.

²² Robert M. Gates and James R. Clapper, *National Security Space Strategy, Unclassified Summary* (Washington, DC: The Pentagon, 2011), 1-2.

²³ “Information Technology and Innovation Foundation (ITIF), *The Internet Economy 25 Years After.com*, March 15, 2010, <http://www.itif.org/publications/internet-economy-25-years-after-com>, quoted in “Fact Sheet: Digital Literacy,” May 13, 2011, http://www.commerce.gov/news/fact-sheets/2011/05/13/fact-sheet-digital-literacy#_edn1 (accessed March 3, 2013).

²⁴ Robert M. Gates, *Quadrennial Defense Review Report* (Washington, DC: The Pentagon, 2010), 2.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 32.

²⁶ Barack Obama, *National Security Strategy, May 2010* (Washington, DC: The White House, 2010), 14.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 22.

²⁸ Michael G. Mullen, *National Military Strategy of the United States of America* (Washington, DC: U.S. Joint Chiefs of Staff, February 8, 2011), 8.

²⁹ Leon E. Panetta, *Sustaining U.S. Global Leadership: Priorities for the 21st Century* (Washington, DC: The Pentagon, January 2012), 2.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 4.

³¹ For further amplification of DOD guidance, see Martin E. Dempsey, *Joint Operational Access Concept, Version 1.0*. (Washington, DC: The Pentagon, January 17, 2012), and Martin E. Dempsey, *Capstone Concept for Joint Operations* (Washington, DC: The Pentagon, September 10, 2012), 11. JOAC provides an insightful discussion of “access,” as well as overarching guidance for Air-Sea Battle, even though the genesis of Air-Sea Battle predated JOAC. CCJO discuss joint functions, specifically joint fires and their relevance to Air-Sea Battle.

³² The first CSBA study, Andrew Krepinevich, *Why AirSea Battle?* (Washington, DC: Center for Strategic and Budgetary Assessments, 2010), <http://www.csbaonline.org/publications/2010/02/why-airsea-battle> (accessed January 23, 2013), was published shortly after his book, *Seven Deadly Scenarios*, was published. Krepinevich’s book discusses Air-Sea Battle and the Western interpretation of the Chinese concept of “Assassin’s Mace,” among other threat topics.

³³ van Tol et al., *AirSea Battle*, 9-10.

³⁴ For a discussion on Air-Sea Battle by the Air Force and Navy service chiefs, and its air and maritime centricities, see Norton A. Schwartz and Jonathan W. Greenert, “Air-Sea Battle: Promoting Stability in an Era of Uncertainty,” *The American Interest*, February 20, 2012, <http://www.the-american-interest.com/article.cfm?piece=1212> (accessed January 7, 2013).

³⁵ Mark Boyer et al., eds., *The American Heritage Dictionary: 2nd College Edition* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1985), 831.

³⁶ 1997 was the last year all regular appropriation bills (13 at that time) were enacted before the start of the Fiscal Year. In the recent past, Continuing Resolutions (CRs) were used for FYs 2010, 2011, 2012 and now 2013. For a discussion on CRs and how often they have been used, see Jessica Tollestrup, *Continuing Resolutions: Overview of Components and Recent Practices* (Washington, D.C: U.S. Library of Congress, Congressional Research Service, August 6, 2012), 12.

³⁷ For a discussion on the aging USAF aircraft fleet and necessary modernization, see Norton A. Schwartz, "Balancing Risk: Readiness, Force Structure, and Modernization," Chief of Staff of the Air Force speech to the Air Force Association Breakfast Series, Arlington, VA, June 11, 2012, 3, <http://www.af.mil/shared/media/document/AFD-120611-028.pdf> (accessed February 10, 2013).

³⁸ Rebecca Grant, "The Evolution of Airpower Under Gates," *Air Force Magazine* 94, no. 2 (February 2011): 54, <http://www.airforce-magazine.com/MagazineArchive/Pages/2011/February%202011/0211gates.aspx> (accessed March 7, 2013).

³⁹ Despite extensive Air Force involvement in the joint fights in Iraq and Afghanistan, the F-22 procurement process contributed to a "beltway" perception of the USAF not being properly focused on those "current fights," and having too much preoccupation with future high-intensity fights with near-peer competitors. This negative perception culminated in the firing of Secretary of the Air Force Michael Wynne and Chief of Staff of the Air Force T. Michael Moseley in 2008.

⁴⁰ Michael B. Donley, "Air Force Today and The Asia-Pacific Rebalance," Secretary of the Air Force speech to Air Force Association Global Warfare Symposium, Los Angeles, CA, November 16, 2012, 12-14, <http://www.af.mil/shared/media/document/AFD-121120-017.pdf> (accessed February 10, 2013).

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 6-7.

⁴² USAF acquisition priorities include F-35, KC-46 next generation tanker, the Long Range Strike systems (next generation bomber), precision munitions, and various Space systems. All of these systems are extremely relevant to Air-Sea Battle. For further explanation, see *Ibid.*, 7-8.

⁴³ Jonathan W. Greenert, "CNO's *Position Report: 2012*" (Washington, D.C: The Pentagon, 2012), 1.

⁴⁴ Office of Budget, Department of the Navy, *Highlights of the Department of the Navy FY 2013 Budget* (Washington, DC: The Pentagon, February 2012), 4-4.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 5-2.

⁴⁶ Greenert, *CNO's Position Report*, 2.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 3.

⁴⁸ James F. Amos, "Address to the Center for Strategic and International Studies," Commandant of the Marine Corps speech, Washington, DC, November 8, 2012, 6-9, <http://www.hqmc.marines.mil/Portals/142/Docs/121108%20--%20CMC%20address%20at>

%20Center%20for%20Strategic%20and%20 International%20Studies.pdf (accessed February 10, 2013).

⁴⁹ Ibid., 9.

⁵⁰ Ibid., 12.

⁵¹ Kenneth McKenzie, "Naval Power and the Future of Assured Access," *Armed Forces Journal* (January 2013), <http://www.armedforcesjournal.com/2013/01/12842317> (accessed February 7, 2013).

⁵² John M. McHugh and Raymond T. Odierno, *2012 Army Posture, The Nation's Force of Decisive Action: A Statement on the Posture of the United States Army 2012*, presented to the 112th Cong., 2nd sess. (Washington, DC: U.S. Department of the Army, 2012), 10.

⁵³ Raymond T. Odierno, "The Force of Tomorrow," *Foreign Policy* (February 4, 2013), 2-8, http://www.foreignpolicy.com/articles/2013/02/04/the_force_of_tomorrow (accessed February 5, 2013).

⁵⁴ McHugh and Odierno, *2012 Army Posture*, 16.

⁵⁵ Raymond T. Odierno, "CSA Remarks at AUSA Eisenhower Luncheon," Chief of Staff of the Army speech to the Association of the United States Army Annual Meeting, Washington, DC, October 23, 2012, 3, http://www.army.mil/article/89823/October_23_2012_CSA_Remarks_at_AUSA_Eisenhower_Luncheon_As_Delivered/ (accessed February 11, 2013).

⁵⁶ Odierno, "The Force of Tomorrow," 8.

⁵⁷ U.S. Joint Chiefs of Staff, *Joint Operations, Joint Publication 3-0* (Washington, DC: U.S. Joint Chiefs of Staff, August 11, 2011), III-1.

⁵⁸ Per USMC doctrine, the Marine Expeditionary Force (MEF) is capable of sustaining combat power for a maximum of 60 days. After that, U.S. Army sustainment capability is a must for further Marine operations. Likewise, air power is made possible by safe, secure bases protected by land forces. Additionally, naval power is enhanced by Army port opening capabilities. Clearly, the Army provides a host of synergizing effects to joint endeavors, which are extremely relevant and must be considered in the force structure debates and indeed, in the context of access.

⁵⁹ Smart employment of all DIME elements is preferable to exclusive use of military power. A widely understood euphemism amongst military professionals is "if all one possesses is a hammer, every problem looks like a nail." Use of the military element of power can be seductive and produce short-term tactical success without regard to long-term strategic difficulty or failure.

⁶⁰ U.S. Joint Chiefs of Staff, *Department of Defense Dictionary of Military and Associated Terms, Joint Publication 1-02 As Amended Through December 15, 2012* (Washington, DC: U.S. Joint Chiefs of Staff, November 8, 2010), 162.

⁶¹ Norton A. Schwartz, "Toward an Integrated Joint Force," *The Journal of International Security Affairs* 23 (Fall/Winter 2012), 5-6.

⁶² Christopher Krisinger, e-mail message to author, January 31, 2013.

⁶³ Electronic Joint Manpower and Personnel System (eJMAPS) is the primary system used by DOD to man joint organizations. eJMAPS levies each service to provide personnel to fill validated Joint Manning Documents.

⁶⁴ Krisinger, e-mail message.

⁶⁵ The structure of maneuver forces refers to the necessary balance between light, medium and heavy combat arms capabilities.

⁶⁶ J. Randy Forbes, "America's Pacific Air-Sea Battle Vision," *The Diplomat*, March 8, 2012, 3, <http://thediplomat.com/2012/03/08/americas-pacific-air-sea-battle-vision> (accessed January 13, 2013).

⁶⁷ Smith, *The Utility of Force*, 81.

⁶⁸ The term "Strategic Communication" (SC) was eliminated in the Fall 2012 from the DOD lexicon, hence, it is not discussed. SC is still used by other parts of the U.S. government.

⁶⁹ Mark Boyer et al., eds., *The American Heritage Dictionary*, 461.

⁷⁰ Schwartz, "Toward an Integrated Joint Force," 1-12.

